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SUBJECT: INCUMBENTS AND OPPOSITION CLAIM VICTORY IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: WARSAW 2372 AND PREVIOUS

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¶1. Summary. Poles voted in municipal and regional elections nationwide on November 12, with many incumbents sailing to re-election, and the opposition Civic Platform (PO) running strong in provincial assemblies. The center piece of the election, the race for Warsaw mayor, will see a run off on November 26 between former PM (and Law and Justice (PiS) candidate) Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and PO's Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, a former head of the Central Bank. PO's strong showing in larger cities and regional assemblies reflects the ongoing polarization of Polish politics, despite PO claims to have rebuked the Kaczynski government. The bigger story is the poor showing of PiS's coalition partners, who may prove more cooperative on the national stage in an effort to fend off another round of parliamentary elections.
End Summary.

¶2. Regional elections throughout Poland on November 12 resulted in a wave of support for incumbent mayors and for the opposition. Fifteen of Poland's 36 largest cities returned incumbent mayors with over fifty percent, thereby avoiding a second round run off. Most of these mayors ran nominally as independents, but have prior affiliation with the opposition PO. Notably only one of the fifteen, Katowice mayor Piotr Uszok, ran as an independent but with former support from PiS.

Run Off in Warsaw on November 26

¶3. Run off elections between the top two contenders will be held in more than twenty cities on November 26. The highest stakes race will be the Warsaw mayoral run off between PiS candidate, former PM Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and PO's Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz. Both candidates are busily wooing support from United Left (UL) candidate Marek Borowski, who surprised many by capturing 23.2% of the vote. With his strong third place finish, Borowski becomes a natural leader of a rehabilitated UL after the electoral shellacking of the SLD and Borowski's break-away Social Democrat Party (SdPl) in last year's national elections. Marcinkiewicz has proposed a grand coalition in Warsaw between PiS and PO. Polls currently show a tight race, tipping in favor of PO's Gronkiewicz-Waltz.

PiS Coalition Partners Are the Big Losers

¶4. PO was quick to claim victory on November 12 when returns showed that it was beating PiS in the bellweather regional assembly races. However, the bigger stories are the ongoing polarization of Polish politics between urban "Polska A" and

rural "Polska B," and the pitiful showing for PiS coalition partners, Self Defense (SO) and the League of Polish Families (LPR). Consistent with the electoral results in last year's national elections, PO ran strongest in cities and regional assembly races. Given his personal popularity, even Marcinkiewicz's first-round win in Warsaw cannot be viewed as a public endorsement of PiS in the capital. PiS did, however, capture a majority of votes in towns and community councils. SO polled a feeble fifth place in most races, eking out the requisite five percent of votes for representation in the some regional assemblies and larger town councils. LPR, by contrast, fell well below the parliamentary threshold, leading many to speculate that it will simply be absorbed by PiS. Its candidate for Warsaw mayor, Wojciech Wierzejski, former leader of LPR's notorious youth arm, finished behind a joke candidate from the party of "Bumpkins and Gnomes", with a mere 0.3% of the vote.

¶15. The Polish Peasants Party (PSL) made a strong fourth place showing across the country, well ahead of its performance in the 2005 elections, and easily beating LPR and SO. In the Mazowiecki province surrounding Warsaw, PSL nearly topped PO for second place. Voters credited PSL leader Waldemar Pawlak for statesman-like conduct during the recent political fracas, when he was approached and summarily dumped (again) by PM Kaczynski as a possible coalition partner.

¶16. Comment: Turnout for regional elections was strong (45.8%), even higher than last year's national elections, suggesting that voters were energized by the political turmoil of the last year. However, PO's strong showing will likely give PM Kaczynski pause before considering a new electoral round next Spring. With their dreadful fifth and sixth place showing, his coalition partners will have no appetite for snap elections that would freeze them out of government. PiS efforts to make inroads into the center right have been successful, with an evolving political scene

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that is dominated by PiS and PO, with the left showing signs of new life in third place. End Comment.

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